

Message Text

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21

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

AID-05 /062 W

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R 140317Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 946

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJ: COMMENTS ON SABAH POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 4443 B. KUALA LUMPUR 4374

1. SUMMARY: TUN MUSTAPHA HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS CONTROL OVER THE SABAH POLITICAL SCENE AS THE OBEDIENT STATE ASSEMBLY APPROVED VOTES OF CONFIDENCE IN MUSTAPHA AND HIS STATE GOVERNMENT. MEANWHILE, HIS POSITION VIS A VIS THE KUALA LUMPUR AUTHORITIES CONTINUES SHAKY. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE SOURCES, MUSTAPHA HAS AGREED WITH PM RAZAK THAT HE WILL RESIGN AS CHIEF MINISTER OF SABAH WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS PROVIDED HE IS ALLOWED TO LEAVE WITH DIGNITY. IN OUR VIEW, HOWEVER, IT IS PREMATURE TO COUNT MUSTAPHA OUT. END SUMMARY.

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2. SABAH STATE ASSEMBLY MET IN SPECIAL SESSION

AUGUST 11, AND OBEDIENTLY GAVE A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE TO CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA AND HIS STATE GOVERNMENT. ASSEMBLY ALSO CENSURED FORMER SABAH HEAD-OF-STATE, OPPOSITION LEADER TUN MOHD. FUAD/DONALD STEPHENS, AND SOUGHT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S GUARANTEE ON "THE POSITION OF SABAH WITHIN MALAYSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT SAFEGUARDS AND AUTONOMY ENJOYED BY THE STATE." THESE MOTIONS WERE PASSED OVERWHELMINGLY WITH ONLY THE FIVE HARD CORE BERJAYA MEMBERS OPPOSING; MUSTAPHA, IN A DISPLAY OF HIS OWN CONFIDENCE, ABSENTED HIMSELF FROM THE VOTING ON THE MOTION OF CONFIDENCE TO ATTEND HIS 57TH BIRTHDAY PARTY.

3. IN A 90-MINUTE SPEECH TO THE STATE ASSEMBLY, MUSTAPHA ASSERTED HIS DEVOTION TO MALAYSIA, AND SAID THAT CLAIMS HE ADVOCATED SECESSION WERE BASED ON STATEMENTS HE MADE IN ANGER WHICH HE DID NOT REALLY MEAN. ADDRESSING CHARGES THAT HE IS CORRUPT, MUSTAPHA SAID: "IF I AM CORRUPT THEN THE SHOLE SABAH CABINET IS CORRUPT" (INCLUDING, BY IMPLICATION, THE FORMER CABINET MINISTERS WHO FOUNDED BERJAYA). BROADENING HIS NET, HE ADDED THAT THE SABAH GOVERNMENT WOULD AGREE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A ROYAL COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE CORRUPTION, BUT ONLY IF THE COMMISSION FIRST INVESTIGATED BERJAYA LEADERS AND THEN LEADERS IN KUALA LUMPUR. REGARDING CHARGES THAT HE HAD INVESTED MONEY OVERSEAS, MUSTAPHA SAID HE DID SO TO AVOID "COMPETING" WITH THE PEOPLE OF SABAH; BERJAYA LEADERS INVESTED THEIR MONEY LOCALLY, THUS DEPRIVING THE PEOPLE OF BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES, HE ASSERTED. THIS INGENIOUS, ALBEIT ILLOGICAL, DEFENSE APPARENTLY CARRIED THE DAY.

4. ALTHOUGH MUSTAPHA APPARENTLY HAS SUCCEEDED IN MAINTAINING HIS CONTROL OVER THE PRESENT POLITICAL SETUP IN SABAH, HIS POSITION WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REMAINS CLOUDED. ON AUGUST 7, PRIME MINISTER RAZAK ANNOUNCED THE RULING NATIONAL FRONT'S DECISION TO ACCEPT THE OPPOSITION BERJAYA PARTY AS A MEMBER "PROVIDED THAT THE PARTY AGREES TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO BE DISCUSSED WITH ITS LEADERS." RAZAK ADDED THAT THE FRONT IS ALSO PREPARED TO WELCOME THE RETURN OF MUSTAPHA'S SABAH ALLIANCE AS A MEMBER WHEN THE PARTY AGREES TO ACCEPT FULL THE FRONT'S PROVISIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND POLICIES.

5. RAZAK IS CONTINUING TO MOVE CAUTIOUSLY AGAINST MUSTAPHA. ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES, WHEN MUSTAPHA MET WITH RAZAK IN KUALA LUMPUR LAST WEEK HE AGREED TO RESIGN AS CHIEF MINISTER OF SABAH WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, PROVIDED HE IS ALLOWED TO DO SO WITH DIGNITY. THIS SCENARIO WOULD HAVE HIM RETIRING FROM POLITICS FOR THE SAKE OF "BUMIPUTRA" (NATIVE) UNITY,

WITH HIS REPUTATION AS "BAPAK SABAH" (FATHER OF SABAH) INTACT. (INDEED AFP REPORTED THAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PASSAGE OF THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, MUSTAPHA MADE A STATEMENT THAT HE SHORTLY WOULD RESIGN.)

6. COMMENT: DESPITE THESE REPORTS OF A MUSTAPHA-RAZAK AGREEMENT, IT IS PREMATURE TO COUNT MUSTAPHA OUT. HE REMAINS PERHAPS THE "GUTTIEST" PLAYER IN THE MALAYSIAN POLITICAL GAME, NOTED FOR HIS AMBITION, RESOURCEFULNESS AND TENACITY IN WIELDING POWER OVER HIS FIEFDOM.
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